INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION? *Why?*

BLACK BELT PHOTOS

THE MARTIAL ARTISTS UNDER ONE ROOF — They gathered together and proved that it could be done without trauma. Each man, accomplished in his art, spoke about problems facing all practitioners of the martial arts forms. From left to right they are: Dick Taylor of aikido, Harold Sharp of judo, Bruce Lee of gung fu, Maki Miyahara of kendo and Tsutomu Ohshima of karate.

The idea of a convention of the martial arts is, in itself, a provocative subject for discussion. This meeting was held in Los Angeles, Calif. offices of BLACK BELT. Participating in the forum were Dick Taylor, 2nd Dan in Aikido, which he's practiced for seven years, one year of karate, one year of judo, director of the Southbay Aikido Club and the North American Aviation Aikido Club; Maki Miyahara, 6th Dan in Kendo, student of this martial art for 34 years, head of the Pasadena Japanese Culture Kendo Club; Harold Sharp, 4th Dan in Judo, a noted author, a practitioner for 16 years, head of the Judo Kan of Canoga Park, Calif.; Tsutomu Ohshima, 5th Dan in Karate, a practitioner for 21 years; and Bruce Lee, noted Gung Fu exponent, head of the Jeet Kune Do. Managing Editor D. David Dreis conducted this seminar.

BLACK BELT: Gentlemen, after much discussion about it, we are planning on staging a convention of the martial arts. Do you think such a convention is really necessary? I mean, do you think that senseis would attend such a meet?

SHARP: Well, I think you have to think that, well, in judo, after many years, it is an accepted sport, it's in the Olympics, there is an active judo organization, there are some rules which have been established by the International Judo Federation and it's a very active area already. Generally speaking, I don't think the average judoist is interested in the other martial arts. His time is taken up with perfecting judo, he is interested in developing his own administration, attracting new students, teachers and in general, judo for him is an already preoccupied activity. We're constantly keeping up with new regulations and making changes. That's the problem that we have. Most of the problems are in teaching the old masters the new regulations.

TAYLOR: Yes, there are wide differences in the arts and the interests, but underlying all of it, really, there is a common ground such as the commercialism of the arts, the amateurism versus the professionalism. Actually, if a convention is set up to have discussion of the problems, I think it might be useful.

SHARP: But what I'm asking is whether the judoist will take time out to attend such a convention.

LEE: Today, there are wide differences in any art. You can see it at karate tournaments where people go just to imitate other people's techniques, but they are totally preoccupied with their own art. I would say that a convention is good if you can get people who are open minded and not prejudiced to come.

SHARP: Certainly . . .

LEE: If you can meet on a common ground of the quality of the martial arts and attract people who are interested in the quality. You know, I think that a lot of people who come to a convention of this type will have to be open minded about the martial arts and will come, not for their glory, but to learn.

OHSHIMA: Yes, that's true. I know that I

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am interested in other martial arts, but a lot of men in the field simply are not. A convention like this is a very good thing and I hope it succeeds. I'll be there, but I hope that other people will come.

LEE: I don't think that you'll get only the quality people, though. I think that you'll get a lot of the phonies as well, guys who want to come to a convention, to say that they came to a convention, that sort of thing. Of course, once at a convention, when they get up to speak, you're going to be able to identify the phonies. I think there are more phonies in the art of gung fu today than in any other art.

TAYLOR: Well, I don't think gung fu has an edge on aikido or any of the other arts.

LEE: Much of the phoniness comes about because of the lack of communication between instructors.

BLACK BELT: That seems to be the common ground you were talking about, the phonies in the business.

LEE: Look, you're going to get a lot of people who won't open up and talk. There are a lot of people who think that if you keep your mouth shut, people will think that you're a philosopher and very smart.

MIYAHARA: A convention, I'm certain will make people aware of the other arts and may increase interest, not only deepening it in their own art, but in other arts. I know, kendo is an art that is sadly lacking from the enthusiasm of the other arts and this convention I think will be of great benefit to the arts such as kendo. I'm not worried as much about the phoniness in kendo as the others may be in karate or judo or . . . Well, I'm really interested in creating interest in kendo, keeping it alive.

BLACK BELT: So, a convention like this would increase interest in kendo, you believe.

MIYAHARA: That's probably true. You know, right now kendo is suffering because it is only attracting students who are interested in history, or they took some zen or because their family's religious and spiritual ties have made them come to study kendo.

SHARP: I don't think that they're going to get a great big interest in kendo or other arts, but they may come because they may want to know more about it, that's all. The judoist is interested in teaching and in the education of the public and this convention, if it focuses on that, will be of benefit to everyone. You know, each man takes up a martial art for his various reasons. A lot of them go to dirty schools and forget the reason, the real reason for studying the martial arts, the improvement of the mind and body. It's a frame of mind. We're all interested in the basic discipline, but many instructors have forgotten the other things. You know, we could exchange ideas on teaching which would be helpful. For example, I've found out that in teaching children, if you divide half of the instruction to playing games and the other half to judo, you can get much farther with them. Now, this is a technique which I have learned over the years and my experiences might prove helpful to those in attendance. Of course, I hope to learn of the experiences of others, too.

OHSHIMA: You know, I worry that the judo man and the aikido man won't come to the event and that it will turn out to be a meeting of karate men. I know that if I went to a judo meeting I would feel out of place. I hope that doesn't happen here because I am interested in the other arts. I have friends in all of the arts. I want to see these people, talk to them about their art. I may not want to learn more about it in a sense of practicing their arts, but maybe when I hear these people speak, I'll say, "Yes, that sounds what I'd like to know more about." I think, for example, that seeing everyone is a good idea. You know, I've seen all of these gentlemen here individually, but never together and I think this kind of all-together meeting will be beneficial. I think that we will see the different levels and the points we will agree upon. This is where the benefits will come. I think we will find, as I have in many cases, that we all reach a certain level together.

SHARP: Sure, this is important. We all have a common interest in the martial arts. Understanding the differences is very necessary. As you grow older in the arts, your motivation changes. When you get older, you're no longer eager to work out in tournaments. You know your art and you tend to forget the appeal of self-defense, you start to concentrate on the martial arts in a general way. We're interested in insurance, discipline, public relations. We all face poor images thanks to the television shows and the movies. I know that I got a telephone call from a mother who wanted to enroll her child in a judo class and asked me if, after he completed his training, would he be able to take knives away from five people. When I laughed she asked, four, then three, then two. It's ridiculous. (laughter)

MIYAHARA: Of course, you're going to run into the problem of commercialism at the convention. Not that the convention is commercial, but there is a major emphasis on this commercialism. I know that in Japan, the commercialism is the last thought.

SHARP: Look, that is a big problem. Just how commercial should you be? What rates should you charge the students? You've got to be commercial in the United States and that's just the facts of life, but how much? In my own experience, for years I charged a very low rate and people told me I was crazy, but I had been trained in Japan and I felt that you should not be a profiteer on the martial arts. Well, after years of struggle, I decided to raise my rates and somehow, I got better students, guys who were committing themselves to learning about judo and all of the guys who dressed in dirty gi and who really couldn't care less dropped by the way side.

LEE: A lot of guys come into karate, for example, because they want to "be admired by your friends, feared by your opponents" — that sort of thing. This convention should discuss this aspect, I think, and all of its benefits and drawbacks. I think that a lot of the mysticism will disappear, certainly if people could hear these people personally.

OHSHIMA: The majority of teachers in the martial arts would find the other martial arts beneficial to them, really, if they took it up. I know that many of the instructors today no longer are any good at their art. Most of the students today are better than their instructors . . .

LEE: Definitely . . . You get better with your open sparring and these teachers don't spar, they don't work.

OHSHIMA: I've seen some of these teachers continually promote themselves. One year, they're first dan, then second dan and then third dan, soon fifth dan. The students work for their grades, but the teachers merely accept them.

TAYLOR: This grading problem faces us all. We have the same technical problems and we have the same problems with our own organization. Everyone seems concerned about which style is best which is a needless question. I think an exchange of viewpoints, perhaps a demonstration of the styles is important.

SHARP: There are problems in all of the martial arts and we should expose them, but be intelligent about it, use discretion in it and recognize that we have enough going against us, we must highlight the good points of every martial art.

MIYAHARA: I think that with kendo, it's really more exciting than people in the other arts want to admit. We all, in the various martial arts want to reach a goal. Every martial arts player, student, wants to reach that goal, whatever it is and when you look at all of the martial arts we are all aiming at the same thing.

OHSHIMA: You listen to any of the authorities on the arts and they're all working for the same thing.

SHARP: We are all specialists in a form of martial arts, of course, but we all face the constant practice of our art, all want to develop fully in the field . . .

LEE: I think that's true. If you're interested in the martial arts you're not really interested in whether or not I could beat you with a hammerlock from judo or a chop from karate. Actually, this would be beneficial for us in the sense that we might say, "Hey, I could use that and if I can't get in with a karate chop, I could use this throw from judo . . ." But I don't think that's important to the understanding and the communication of the martial arts.

BLACK BELT: Do you think that it might come about, as Bruce points out, that a

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Bruce Lee, right, believes, "a lot of guys come into karate, for example, because they want to be 'admired by your friends and feared by your opponents'." Aikido man Taylor and judoist Sharp ponder the aspects as they pertain to their individual martial art. True?

OHSHIMA: *"I've seen some of these teachers promote themselves. One year, they're first dan, then second dan, then third dan, soon fifth dan. The students work for their grades, but the teachers merely accept them."*

student of one martial art might take up another martial art and then be that more proficient?

LEE: The whole thing is summed up in one word, "efficiency." If you can beat a man quickly and easily, who cares what school it comes from?

SHARP: I don't think that you'll ever find one student taking all of the arts, or actually leaving one art and going to another. There is too much to learn from one art and you've got to continue to practice it again and again . . .

OHSHIMA: I don't agree. I think right now, we are exchanging students and many of my karate students have studied judo and I think probably many of your students are studying karate.

SHARP: A small minority.

OHSHIMA: Ah! But they are and that's the big thing. It may get more, especially with this convention which I think is a wonderful thing. I hope it goes on every year and that people know one another and learn from one another and that students will exchange one art for another and learn both . . .

TAYLOR: Well that would be difficult, really, because, well, there is a different kata. For example, karate's main interest is in stance and in aikido it's in movement.

OHSHIMA: Oh, maybe there is a different way to begin, but this may surprise you, right now, I would like to learn aikido. You know, I have been with karate all of my life, but I would like to know aikido, too.

OHSHIMA: There is really not that much difference.

LEE: Look, they say that one art is soft and the other art is hard. Judo is soft, karate is hard. Maybe our approach is different, but we all reach this ultimate goal, this ultimate point together. Personally, I believe that a guy should know more than one art.

SHARP: I disagree. I mean in the sense that he should practice it.

LEE: Why not? This is just prejudice which keeps a person from learning another art and working at it. In self-defense if your interest is to throw him, okay, but why not hit him, too? You're looking for a way to beat him and that's what counts. I think the convention should have speakers who would tell what they believe and then have questions from the floor. That's what counts.

TAYLOR: We get that all the time. People ask me "what is aikido?" Only at the convention, we would be talking to instructors.

LEE: I don't think that you're going to get ridiculous comparisons at a convention. I mean, this stupid idea that one form is better than another. It all depends on who is your opponent, what's his size, his weight, what's his training.

OHSHIMA: The convention will open people's eyes to the differences and it will stop all the suspicions of the other martial arts as well as putting people together, in a friendly atmosphere, going in one direction, to improving one's knowledge of all the martial arts. I'm very much in favor of this convention idea and I think everyone who has a chance to attend, both big and small, should come.

SHARP: We are on different plateaus, to be sure and we're in different worlds, we have different emotions, different experiences, but on the higher levels, we are using the same tools. That's important to convey to people. The judoist may be primarily concerned with his own art, but he must be persuaded to open his eyes. Look, it's like knowing chess or baseball and knowing them both. You can be expert in one and not the other and you have got to reach the area where you no

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longer worry about self-defense, where you take it, not for granted exactly, but it's not important. Every top man I know is no longer concerned with self-defense alone. Is a baseball player interested in beating someone over the head with his bat? No, he's interested in hitting a home run and that's what counts. The younger fellow is interested in winning, winning, but the older you get, the more you're concerned with the growth and understanding of the whole field. The convention will appeal to only the experienced martial arts teacher, the man who enjoys listening to basic common denominator subjects. I recall when, in 1964, I heard Bruce Lee talk about his gung fu and I found myself in basic agreement with what he said although he was talking about another martial art, other than judo. I found it interesting.

LEE: And I find listening to subjects about other martial arts interesting. Sure, I believe that my technique is better. Everyone feels that his technique is better, but I really feel it. But can you really compare? If a guy comes at you with a big sword and he's seven feet tall and you're five feet tall and unarmed, I don't care what form you use, it's going to be tough.

SHARP: Basically our problem is that too many of these so-called masters lean too heavily on the Orient and what happened there. In the old days, the black belt was really a rarity, but nowadays they're a dime a dozen. I think today's martial arts student and teacher must adjust to new methods and ideas, come up-to-date with the times. I also think that instructors shouldn't have to be graded. The big question is not what rank the instructor has, but can he teach the art? That is the big question. Many of these people with their great ranks are simply not good teachers and I think instructors shouldn't be graded. This would make a whole day's discussion.

BLACK BELT: You know, each of you represent a different martial art and yet each of you in this discussion have found a common denominator, a common ground on which to discuss. It didn't matter today what art you practiced, you voiced similar opinions and came to the same conclusions. If we can achieve that in the convention, perhaps solve some of the problems, maybe the convention would be a good thing.

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